

Opportunity Skyway...

An Introduction to the World of Aviation Careers

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Those of us who work at an airport are constantly reminded of the importance of aviation in all of our lives. Since the Wright Brothers took that first powered flight nearly 100 years ago, air travel has revolutionized how people and goods move around the world. It takes a wide variety of skills and jobs at King County International Airport/Boeing Field, one of the busiest general aviation airports in the country, to help keep planes flying, people moving, and packages arriving at their destinations on time.

Over the last eight years, KCIA has shared the world of aviation careers with local students through the Opportunity Skyway Program. Opportunity Skyway was created in 1996 by the King County Council to help students explore the wide variety of careers in aviation-based industries and to help teachers use aviation as a tool in mathematics, science, technology and social studies. The program supports government policies that encourage education and regional workforce development. In addition, the program supports the Federal Aviation Administration's goals to for aviation education, as well as the airport's efforts to foster good relations with schools and families in our communities.

More than one thousand students and teachers participate each year in activities that include academic programs, classroom speakers, workshops and curriculum, as well as tours and career fairs. Older students are provided the opportunity to build full-sized kit aircraft in an airport hangar. Mindful of the current push for higher standards in schools and the workplace, all classroom programs and materials are based on the new Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and prepare students for state standardized tests. Aircraft assembly projects integrate academic and vocational learning and are based on current industry and safety competencies.

Opportunity Skyway serves as an umbrella program encompassing diverse partners that share a mutual interest in aviation-related learning and creating jobs for the future. Since 1997, program partners have included the Seattle, Highline, and Renton School Districts, the SeaTac Occupational Skill Center, South Seattle Community College, King County Work Training, King County 4-H, the Port of Seattle, the Museum of Flight, the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA Chapter 26), and others. Countless volunteers from the Boeing Company, Airport tenants, local aviation businesses, labor organizations, and retiree groups have opened their doors, donated tools and materials, and contributed expertise as mentors and advisors. One look at the Opportunity Skyway hangar, and most are hooked on the concept and eager to share their resources.

Opportunity Skyway's wide-range of educational activities and programs are divided into three categories: Airport-based Instruction, Aviation Exploration Activities, and Instructional Enhancement.

Airport-based Instruction

Seattle School District Inter-agency Academy schools teach both academic and technical skills in the Opportunity Skyway hangar. Their students were not successful in the traditional high school and have now returned to complete their education. Last year, this program achieved the honor for highest academic achievement over more than a dozen other sites.

The aircraft assembly program became operational in July of 1997. Seventy students participated that first year -- many from homes that spoke no English, few with post-secondary plans, and none with any prior construction training. Students learned about the science of flight, to read blueprints, work as a team and safely operate tools. At the end of the first summer session, the students had completed a fabric-covered Rans Coyote. Using new components, the same plane has now been disassembled and rebuilt seven times. The airport provides aircraft kits, an assembly shop, technical assistance, volunteer help and insurance. School district partners provide teachers, students, transportation and other student-related support services.

Students from Sealath High School spend each morning of the academic year building more difficult models, and have completed both a helicopter and a Zenith Zodiac airplane. Students who complete the class are eligible to enroll in and receive credit for classes in a FAA-certified Airframe and Powerplant technology program at South Seattle Community College.

Aviation Exploration Activities

Whether you are five or eighty-five, you are never too young or old to enjoy the fast paced activities at an airport. Everyday is different, and the wide variety of operations at Boeing Field makes for an especially interesting experience. Last year, more than 70 different groups -- school classes, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Senior Centers -- participated in the free tour program. The responses from participants are always interesting. A teacher from Renton's Lakeridge Elementary School who accompanied students on visits to explore careers sent a note saying, "Thank you for the inspiration and sharing your school with ours".

In addition to tours, students and teachers visit the airport for workshops, career fair days, summer camps and job shadows. The airport also participates in special events such as the National and King County sponsored "Take Your Children to Work Day".

Instructional Enhancement

Airport employees share their jobs through visits to local classrooms and at school events, but now also rely on technology to connect students and aviation careers through a series of case studies on the Airport web site. Based on the Harvard Business School case study model and developed through a partnership with the Port of Seattle, teachers can download both the student version and the teacher's notes by simply linking to curriculum at www.metrokc.gov/airport/education/index.htm. The case studies offer the opportunity to explore the challenges faced by Galvin Flying's Chuck Kegley as he plans for the arrival of sixty corporate planes...or Nancy Griffith of the Aviator Store developing a business plan...or lead engineer David Robinson making changes to the production of the Boeing 777.

Program Success

The highest accolades for Opportunity Skyway came recently from a former student. He completed his high school diploma, learned technical skills, and improved his attendance and

attitude. He then decided that a move out of town to break from gang affiliations was in order. He passed the test to join the Navy based on the skills he had learned in Opportunity Skyway. Three months after he enlisted, and assigned to become an A&P mechanic, he called the airport. "Joining the Navy was the best thing that I ever did", he said, "and Opportunity Skyway gave me the boost to get there."

As we say in Opportunity Skyway...the sky's the limit!